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AUTHOR Bhola, H. S.
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ABSTRACT

The role of literacy in the revitalization of societies is particularly meaningful in the context of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), a group of nine countries (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) surrounding or surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (RSA). This region is approaching a "moment of disjunction"--a historical moment when an existing mythologic and the accompanying social order die and a new mythologic and social order emerge. The existing social order of apartheid in the RSA must be reconstituted. Several strategies are required to implement that change--diplomatic, economic, military, and cultural. The objectives of the cultural strategy should be to create both nationalism and Pan-Africanism, objectives which can only be met with universal literacy. At the societal level, universal literacy will increase the possibility of modernization and democratization. Furthermore, once individual societies are revitalized through universal literacy, a genuine Pan-Africanism could emerge--not merely of the bureaucratic elite but of all the people. Multiple literacies should be taught to African adults: literacy in the mother tongue; literacy in the regional lingua franca; and literacy in a metropolitan language. The universalization of literacy will hasten the destruction of apartheid and help to create a society which can live together in harmony. (MM)

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LITERACY FOR REVITALIZATION IN THE SADCC COUNTRIES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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H.S. Bhola
Professor of Education
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN., USA, 47405
Tel.:(812) 855-6843

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LITERACY FOR REVITALIZATION

IN THE SADCC COUNTRIES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

A discussion of the role of literacy in the revitalization of societies should be particularly meaningful in the context of Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), a group of nine countries -- Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe -- surrounding or surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (RSA).

The Southern African region today is a region of violence and exploitation, a wildly churning cauldron of history. The nine SADCC countries are struggling for economic and political survival against the Apartheid regime in RSA. The African National Congress (ANC), an independence movement banned by the government of South Africa is fighting a guerrilla war within and without the country to overthrow the Apartheid regime and to create a new nation of Blacks and Whites to be called Azania. The South-West African Peoples´ Organization (SWAPO) is fighting for the termination of RSA´s illegal occupation of Namibia. To borrow a phrase from David E. Apter (1987), the region may be on the brink of a "moment of disjunction" -- a historical moment when an existing mythologic and the accompanying social order die and a new mythologic and a new social order are born. Does literacy have a role to play first in bringing about a moment of disjunction in history, and then to ensure that the emergent realities are both materially and morally just for the people living through that particular historical moment? This is a question certainly worth speculating even though certain answers may not be forthcoming.

The argument of this paper is structured as follows: RSA, as presently constituted, is morally repugnant and needs to be reconstituted. The change will not, however, come without sacrifice. Multiple strategies will be required: the diplomatic strategy, the economic strategy, the strategy of the armed struggle, and, the currently neglected, cultural strategy. The objectives of the cultural strategy should be to create both nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Its essential instrument must be literacy -- "adult literacy" since the present generations of youth and adults, bypassed by schools, can not simply be written off. This cultural strategy in the short run will help in mobilization of and participation by the people; in the medium run will make modernization and democratization possible; and in the long run will provide ideological categories and organizational capacity necessary for the consolidation of Pan-Africanism.

The Southern African Region in a Moment of Disjunction?

Within the scope of this paper, only a brief sketch of the political realities of the Southern African region can be offered: The so-called Republic of South Africa is a republic of the White minority that holds the Black majority in collective slavery in their own land, by the imposition of Apartheid supported by the full power of the state. The mythologic (Apter, 1987) of the Afrikaner government preaches the supremacy of the White over the Black, sanctified by the Bible, as interpreted by the Dutch Reformed Church. At the level of the mundane, the South African Government boasts of having better educational and economic conditions for their Blacks than anywhere else in that

part of Africa and sells to the world the image of the happy Black man satisfied with his lot of serving his White masters.

The instruments of enforcing the Afrikaner mythologic are brutal and the structures of oppression are deeply entrenched. The superiority of the White man has been institutionalized in Aparthied which literally means "living apart". Through Apartheid, the state allocates the best of economic, social and political goods to the White population and the worst to the Black people. The Black man has no rights. His only opportunity is to serve the White masters in their homes and factories. The protest from within and without is broken by the government by using a variety of strategies: dividing to rule by playing one tribe against the other; coopting some of the Blacks to the existing system through jobs leading to their embourgeoisement (Apter, 1987) and consequent depoliticization; by creating the so-called homelands for the Blacks within the South African borders; and by exporting violence to the front-line states who have had the temerity of supporting the aspirations of the Blacks in South Africa and in Namibia.

Both sides are bleeding, but the protest has not died. There is more to the frustration expressed in hysterical destruction of life and property. The protest is acquiring a mythologic of its own and this mythologic is being received more and more sympathetically inside South Africa and around the world. The mythologic of the ANC (and of African nationalism in general) is stated in terms of democratic principles. The ANC demands one-man-one-vote leading to a multi-racial government representing a multi-racial society in which all can make genuine

choices and fulfil their personal potential in conditions of fairness and freedom.

The strategies being used by the ANC and the countries of the SADCC region are multiple. First of all, there is the diplomatic strategy. This has not brought much success, however. While the United Nations Organization has been sympathetic, the vested interests of some nations and the call of blood of the "kith and kin" have kept some powerful nations of the West on the side of South Africa rather than with the poor Blacks inside RSA and those living in the SADCC region.

Another strategy used by countries in the region is economic. SADCC, for example, is an economic organization that ostensibly eschews politics. In 1980, while adopting the "Lusaka Declaration: South Africa -- Towards Economic Liberation," SADCC set for itself the following objectives: (1) Reduction of external dependence, especially, dependence on the Republic of South Africa; (2) Creation of operational and equitable regional integration; (3) Mobilization of domestic and regional resources to carry out national, interstate and regional policies to reduce dependence and build genuine regional co-ordination; and (4) Joint action to secure international understanding of, and practical support for, the SADCC strategy. This economic liberation is sought through governmental actions in four sectors: transport and communication; food security; energy; and manpower training at the high and middle levels (Tostensen, 1982; SADCC, 1982?). The irony is that most of the SADCC nations have extreme economic dependence on RSA. It is hard for them to

survive without exporting labor to and importing goods from South Africa.

Thus, it is that in an act of desperation, the ANC had launched armed struggle in South Africa. It is in great sadness that one must accept the inevitability of increased violence in the region during the next few years. RSA will not give freedom to Black Africans served on a silver platter. If we extrapolate the calculus of violence from the history of the struggle in Zimbabwe, it might mean many thousands Whites dead and a bloodbath for Blacks who may die in the millions before South Africa will be free. Yet, even though RSA has all the power and the Blacks are relatively powerless, the situation must change. The only possibility for RSA to continue as an Apartheid regime in the foreseeable future is if the whole world gets divided on racial lines of White versus everybody else; and, if by limited war and nuclear blackmail, the White nations once again decide to establish world-wide colonialism. Fortunately, this does not seem to be a likely scenario.

The Cultural Strategy in the Battle for Southern Africa and the Role of Adult Literacy in this Strategy

It is unlikely that the transformation from an Apartheid regime to the commonwealth of people will come about without violence. But bloodshed can be reduced through the use of the cultural strategy in which literacy is a sine qua non. Here is the structure of this part of the argument: The cultural strategy means the creation of a shared culture overriding micro cultures. The cultural strategy requires communication among

communities, among tribes within nations, and across nations. Within nations it should create inter-tribal and inter-racial tolerance and cooperation, leading to modernization and democratization. Across nations it should create a sense of Pan-Africanism that will make regional cooperation among the SADCC countries a real possibility. But communication will require a common langauge -- a regional lingua franca. The essential instrument of creating such communication in the region will have to be literacy. Media strategies alone would not help. Only literacy promotion will provide rewards in the short, the medium and in the long run.

The battle of the gun between the South African regime and the principles in the region is an unequal battle. But the battle on the cultural front is also unequal. The battle-front of information production, dissemination and utilization rooted in literacy is also unfavorable to the Black man. Here is the literate White populations pitted against the predominantly illiterate Blacks who are difficult to ideologize, mobilize and organize. Universalization of literacy in RSA and in all the countries of the SADCC region is important. This will add potential to all individuals enabling them to handle larger categories of economic, social, political and cultural dimensions and thereby rise above localism and tribalism.

At the societal level, it will increase the possiblility of modernization and democratization. Once individual societies in the SADCC region are themselves revitalized through universal literacy, it would be possible for a genuine Pan-Africanism to emerge -- a Pan-Africanism not merely of the bureaucratic elite but of all the people. Most importantly, literate Black

population might be better trusted by the White minority now in power. The mythology of Black peril, bloodthirsty and rapacious, might be dissipated.

Are Nationalism and Pan-Africanism Culturally Possible in the SADCC Region?

Is it even realistic to talk of the role of literacy in promoting nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the region? Can African tribes even be considered culturally congenial so as to accept higher categories of identification? And what language of literacy will after all serve the purposes of nationalism and Pan-Africanism at the same time?

The concept of nationalism is easily understood, but it may be useful to give here a definition of the concept of Pan-Africanism. Esedebe (1982) sees Pan-Africanism to include the following components: "Africa as the homeland of Africans and persons of African origin, solidarity among men of African descent, belief in a distinct African personality, rehabilitation of Africa's past, pride in African culture, Africa for Africans in church and state, and the hope for a united and glorious future Africa." These components of Pan-Africanism can be organized along two dimensions: ideational and emotional (Bhola, 1987). Along the ideational dimension, Pan-Africanism can be seen as a historical awareness, a political agenda, and economic necessity for African nations trying to fight "neo-colonial balkanization." But Pan-Africanism is also an emotion which must have psychocultural roots (Singer, 1968). For both the idea and emotion of Pan-Africanism, the African peoples everywhere (and in

the SADCC region) must learn to use categories of self-definition that are as large as Africa itself.

The discussion so far begs another question: Is there a larger African culture within which larger self-definitions can be made. Abraham (1962) asserts that there are. He has heard "responsive throbbings in the collective consciousness of Africa." He has identified a "Paradigm of African Society" with the following central concepts: philosophic aspects, theory of man and society, theory of government, legal system, military organization, literature, ethics and metaphysics, and institutions. The challenge of Pan-Africanism is to make this dormant paradigm articulated in the lives of peoples.

Culture, Communication and Language

Commonality, community and communication have the same etymological root. The great Paradigm of African Society (or Culture) needs communication for awakening. The throbbings of the collective consciousness of Africa must be translated into speech. Africans must speak to each other and must listen to each other. Without this discourse neither the ideas nor the emotions of Pan-Africanism will become actualized.

What will be the language to voice Pan-Africanism? The great Paradigm of African Society is waiting to be articulated, but what will be the language of its articulation? It is important to remember that through the contraditions of history, the first battles in behalf of Pan-Africanism were fought in European tongues. The African elite developed the ideal of Pan-Africanism and experienced the accompanying emotion in English,

French or Portuguese. There were two important consequences from the use of metropolitan languages as vehicles of Pan-Africanism. First, Pan-Africanism was confined to the new African elite. The common peoples of Africa were not touched. Second, the movement was fragmented into three streams of the English-speaking, the French-speaking and the Portuguese-speaking Africans.

To match the throbbings of a collective consciousness of an African Culture, one has to find an African language that is on the African side of the racial divide and in which Africans can collectively hear echoes of their own collective memories. The solution is not easy. There are in Africa at least 1000 different and mutually unintelligible languages, divided into four language families: Congo-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan, Khoisan and Afro-Asiatic. These language families are as different from each other as Indo-European languages are from Chinese. At the same time Swahili, Bemba, Lingala, Kongo, Hausa, and Mandingo have become the lingua francas of their regions (Encyclopedia Americana, 1985). Clearly, all or some of these languages will have to be the languages of Pan-Africanism. This is not merely an intellectual possibility, but a cultural possibility as well. Ngugi wa Thiong´o (1986) writing about Africa during the colonial period says: "The peasantry saw no contradiction between speaking their own mother-tongues and belonging to a larger national or continental geography. They saw no necessary antagonistic contradiction between belonging to their immediate nationality, to their multinational state along the Berlin-drawn boundaries, and to Africa as a whole. These people happily spoke Wolof,

Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Arabic, Amharic, Kiswahili, Gikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Shona, Ndebele, Kimbundu, Zulu or Lingala without this fact tearing the multinational states apart."

Will the use of more than one lingua franca fragment Pan-Africanism? It will not if there will be enough people who will learn more than one regional lingua franca; and if there is considerable contact among intellectuals and artists writing in these languages. Finally, intelligent use will have to be made of the metropolitan languages in concert with languages of Africa. There will be another price to pay. Over the centuries, many of the 1000 African languages will perhaps disappear, not as does a river in the desert sand, but as smaller streams merge into a great river.

Settings for Speech Encounters

Settling the language question does not dispose of the question of media of communication or of the settings for speech encounters among peoples. We can communicate in face-to-face situations to build commonalities within the framework of an African culture. But such interaction, while essential, is insufficient. Articulation of the great Paradigm of African Society through face-to-face interactions may take centuries.

The other solution is in the use of mass media, particularly the use of radio in developing an African culture by cultivating an African audience. Unesco, over the years, has talked enthusiastically of the possibilities of radio in teaching foreign languages and in contributing to international understandings. This solution is technically possible, but not

as feasible as it might look at first sight. First, there are some practical problems. Radio is not as easily available in rural Africa as we sometimes like to believe. Also, it has become a tool of entertainment rather than of instruction. There are also several constraints inherent in radio as a tool of communication. Radio in its instructional role (and even in its entertainment role) uses the grammar of print. The non-literate gets less out of radio than does the literate. Detailed historical records and philosophic systems are not possible in totally illiterate communities. Radio is not a good vehicle either for ideology or for technology that genuine Pan-Africanism would demand. Of course, this is not to say that radio and other electronic media have not role whatsoever in articulating the dormant Paradigm of African Society. Indeed, media may do quite well in promoting the "myth" in the new "mythologic." We must say, however, that the central role in the cultural strategy for nationalism and Pan-Africanism has to be assigned to the print media, best suited to carry the "logic" in the "mythologic".

Not Without Literacy

Yet another dimension of the question of oracy versus literacy must also be discussed. We may begin by posing the question in this form: Is Pan-Africanism impossible among non-literate people? Theoretically, speaking some sort of Pan-Africanism is possible as history bears out. Pan-Africanism is a reality in the minds and hearts of many already. But it is, as we have mentioned earlier, Pan-Africanism of the elite. For the cultural strategy for liberation in Southern Africa, Pan-

Africanism has to become a mass phenomenon. That seems impossible without near-universal literacy in the region.

Literacy, we know from historical experience, is able to carry both ideas and emotions. It is a medium that is highly versatile. It gives freedoms to the user that no other medium does. Once the book is in the hands of a reader, the reader has the choice of time and place of study and is free to have repeated and random access to the material in the book. The ability to be with the book alone encourages reflection. The reader can be a writer as well, without the need for anything more elaborate than pencil and paper. Thus, codification of reality is as much possible as decodification of reality as seen by others. By its very nature, literacy enables a person to rise above the physical-definitional reality and to have ideas and emotions about symbolically constructed reference groups and systems. Literacy is the antidote to isolation and is the tool of "panning out". Ngugi (1986) gave literacy an important role in his battle for the decolonization of the African mind. Its role in Pan-Africaniam may be similarly irreplaceable.

We are suggesting that multiple literacies be taught to African adults: literacy in the mother tongue; literacy in the regional lingua franca and literacy in a metropolitan language. Literacy should be taught first in the mother tongue, except where it could be taught as easily in the regional lingua franca. Literacy, it is said, is learned only once. The literacy skills learned through literacy acquisition in the mother tongue can then be transferred to literacy in the regional lingua franca and then to the metropolitan language. On the surface, literacy in

three languages may look burdensome, but three-language formulas have become standard practice in many school systems around the developing world.

It is important to point out that near-universal literacy is important in the SADCC region not merely for overthrowing Apartheid. It is, of course, important for modernization and democratization within each of the SADCC member states. Finally, literacy would be important for continued defence of freedoms in the region. It need not be taken for granted that after RSA has changed from an Apartheid regime into a rainbow republic of the Black, the White, the Asian and the colored, the battle for freedom would have been won for ever. It is quite possible that a new South Africa would not be willing to let go of its stranglehold on the nine states organized into SADCC. Without revitalization through literacy, these nine countries could continue to be at the mercy of RSA. The new governing elite in South Africa could easily find reasons to continue their exploitation of weaker nations accusing them of incapacity and inability to fend for themselves.

Realities on the Ground

To complement theoretical discussion of the the role of literacy in revitalization, we must briefly sketch the practice of literacy in the region:

1985 Estimates of Illiteracy Rates for the Age Group 15+

Country	Percentage of illiteracy	Absolute numbers of illiterates
Angola	59.0	NA
Botswana	29.2	139,000
Lesotho	26.4	234,000
Malawi	58.8	2,219,000
Mozambique	62.0	4,157,000
Namibia	27.5	179,000
South Africa	43.0*	N.A.
Swaziland	32.1	112,000
Tanzania	15.0**	N.A.
Zambia	24.3	868,000
Zimbabwe	26.0	1,198,000

* 1982 figures.
** Tanzanian government documentation now talks of less than 15 per cent illiteracy rates in the country.

Most figures are from World Education at a Glance, Unesco Office of Statistics, Paris, 1987.

In two separate papers, Bhola (1985a; 1985b) had reviewed literacy policies and performance of different countries in the SADCC region. He had found reason for hope but not for excessive optimism. The cultural strategy was by no means a part of revitalization in all countries. The role of literacy in nationalism and Pan-Africanism was not seriously considered. In three years since the earlier reviews, nothing much seems to have changed. Tanzania alone remains committed to universal literacy

in the country. A successful literacy campaign brought illiteracy down from 67% in 1967 to less than 15% at present. Now Tanzania has concurrently embarked upon a post-literacy campaign. Zimbabwe declared a literacy campaign in 1983 which may now be faltering. Botswana continues with its national literacy program. Malawi after completing a Unesco-sponsored pilot project in literacy declared a national program in 1986. Angola and Mozambique have continued their commitments to literacy promotion but have not been able to do much in the prevailing conditions of war.

Concluding Remarks

We did not by any means seek to make the point that the battle of freedom in South Africa or of economic liberation in the SADCC region will be won by the literacy primer alone. In sadness, we predict that the going will be tough and bloody. What we have suggested is that the universalization of literacy in the region will make mobilization of the people and thereby the revitalization of their communities possible. We suggest that literate people will be able to think in terms of higher categories of human brotherhood that could include tribes across countries and races across the high walls of prejudice. The literate on both sides will respect each other better and will be able to first hasten the arrival of the moment of disjunction to destroys Apartheid and then manoeuvre a safe pessage through the disjunction to create a society that can live together in harmony. That would need leadership, ideology and a cadre system (Yap, 1984) none of which is effectively possible without literacy.

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